



St. Mary's County Public Schools Central Administration

Office of the Superintendent
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Dr. J. Scott Smith
Superintendent

July 30, 2020

Dear SMCPs Families,

Throughout this summer, St. Mary's County Public Schools (SMCPs) has worked with a team of stakeholders, including parents, students, teachers, and administrators, to develop plans for a safe return to school this fall. The details of recovery planning and updates to the community are posted on the [SMCPs website](#). Our work has been focused on developing protocols and practices that would allow staff and students to return to schools in a modified fashion, with reduced capacity and "hybrid" learning that would be supported both in the classroom and through online learning. Our work has been governed by the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) "[Considerations for Schools](#)," and the Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE) "[Maryland Together: Maryland's Recovery Plan for Education](#)." Both organizations have revised their guidance throughout the summer, complicating our work.

On Wednesday, July 22, 2020, the [SMCPs Safe Return to School](#) plan was presented to the Board of Education for their review and input. The plan was not finalized on that date, as Governor Hogan announced a press conference later that same day and the Maryland State Superintendent of Schools, Karen Salmon, would be speaking. The video for the Governor's press conference is [linked here](#). We had assumed a decision would be announced by the State Superintendent. Instead, Dr. Salmon reiterated known guidance, now framed as "guardrails," and made the statement that each school district has "the flexibility to determine, in consultation with their local health officers, how they will open, and which groups of students and staff will be able to re-enter buildings." Please know that we worked closely with the St. Mary's County Health Department as we have developed all plans and will continue to do so.

SMCPs will begin the 2020-2021 school year with all students completely online for the first quarter. Throughout the first quarter, SMCPs and the St. Mary's County Health Department will monitor several local data points, including: percent of local population tested, positivity rate of those tested, and demographics and outcome data on confirmed cases of COVID-19 in St. Mary's County residents. The Health Department has created a [data dashboard](#) to share some of this local data. Statewide and national indicators of the pandemic will also be monitored as future trends in our community may be impacted by situations around us. This local, statewide, and national data - along with our growing understanding of the science of COVID-19 disease - will be used to determine if and when student populations can be brought into the school for in-person learning. It is our goal to safely provide in-person instruction to students but this will only happen when data and science suggest that it can be done so safely for students and staff.

Online Learning:

The new school year will begin on Monday, August 31, 2020, with all students enrolled in online/virtual courses through the Schoology Learning Management System. Schoology allows for teacher-led, interactive instruction aligned to the Maryland College and Career Ready Standards. Each teacher's class will be in a closed session with the students in that class. Through this closed classroom environment, online learning will include face-to-face video instruction, screencasts provided by the teacher, and interactive instructional activities.

St. Mary's County Public School System does not discriminate on the basis of race, color, gender, age, national origin, marital status, sexual orientation, religion, or disability in matters affecting employment or providing access to programs.

While Schoology may be accessed on a smartphone, tablet, or computer - to best support this instructional platform, students in grades 1-12 should have access to a computer that they can use independently to participate in each day's instruction. Personally owned devices can be used to access online course material. Most current technologies will work with Schoology, with the following minimum device requirements:

- Operating Systems: Windows 10; iOS 11; Android version 6 or higher
- Browsers: Chrome (latest version); Safari versions 10 and 11; Firefox (latest version); Edge for Windows 10.

Students in grades PreK-K will need access to a tablet. Plans and purchases are underway to provide an iPad, loaded with Schoology and other WiFi free developmentally appropriate apps, for Pre-K and Head Start. Information about deployment will be communicated as the devices arrive.

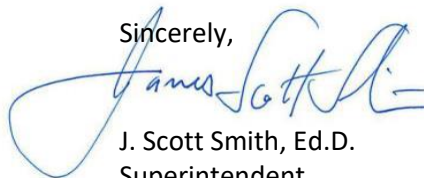
Recognizing there are students who do not have access to their own device, SMCPs has been working throughout the summer to pursue funding to purchase and prepare laptops/devices for distribution for students who do not have or are unable to obtain a device.

Please respond to the [online survey](#) to let us know if your student has a device or access, as well as technology needs. Please complete a separate form for each child. The link to all schools' surveys is posted online at <https://tinyurl.com/SMCPsreturnTech>. Please complete this survey by August 5, 2020.

We have challenging months ahead of us - as challenging as those we have recently weathered. I am humbled and heartened by the incredible persistence of our community, the sacrifice of those for others, and the leaders who rise up to help us through each day.

We will get through this and be stronger on the other side.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "James Scott Smith". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "J" and "S".

J. Scott Smith, Ed.D.
Superintendent